

# TOWARD A REINTERPRETATION OF THOMAS PAINE

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Since Professor Clark is preparing an extensive book on *Thomas Paine and Eighteenth Century Radicalism in America, England, and France*, he takes this opportunity to lay his tentative and general conclusions before scholars, and he would be grateful for criticism which would enable him to correct errors of fact or interpretation before these conclusions are elaborated in book form.—J. B. H.

IF THOMAS PAINE has been popularly regarded<sup>1</sup> as an honorable champion of political liberty who, deplorably and irrelevantly, succumbed in his old age to religious infidelity, Moncure D. Conway, his most able biographer, interpreter, and editor, held that Paine's thought, which helped to call forth the republics of America and France, is "explicable only by the intensity of his Quakerism."<sup>2</sup> The first view is hardly tenable after a genetic study of the growth of his mind and his *a priori* and syllogistic habit of thought. As regards the second view, considerable influence may be ascribed to such Quaker doctrines as the fatherhood of God, the consequent brotherhood of men, the possibility of a direct knowledge of the deity without mediator or advocate, simplicity, and a humanitarianism stemming from a divine benevolence. The "intensity" of early Quaker influence upon Paine seems to have been exaggerated, however, and a detailed comparison between a typical and contemporary Quaker such as Woolman and Paine suggests many doctrines of the latter which are scarcely accounted for by Quakerism. A historical study of the growth of Paine's mind, in the light of his neglected reading (he cites over a hundred authors) and his personal associations with well-read thinkers, suggests that he can be best explained, perhaps, when the organic development of the complete body of his thought is considered in relation to the pattern of ideas germane to the En-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Samuel Adams's letter to Paine, printed in *The Writings of Thomas Paine* (hereafter referred to as *Writings*), ed. Conway (New York, 1894-1896), IV, 201-202.

<sup>2</sup> M. D. Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1892), II, 201; I, 231. According to Mary A. Best (*Thomas Paine*, New York, 1927, p. 406), Paine was "in his time the greatest exponent" of Quakerism.

lightenment, and, in particular, to scientific deism, which was powerfully reinforced by Newtonian doctrines of natural law and order. If it should happen to turn out that Paine's battle-cry, "Follow Nature," meant, in its climate of opinion, a disciplined conformity to a law and order universal and immutable—if it meant not license but law, not anarchy but order,—obviously the way might be paved for a modified view of the dignity and intrinsic philosophic value of thought which conditioned the birth of the two greatest republics of modern times. Although Quaker humanitarianism may have originally made Paine hostile toward the cruel deity revealed in the Old Testament, and although astronomical science based partly on observation may have made him regard the Christian system as "little and ridiculous,"<sup>3</sup> it is of sovereign importance in approaching the study of Paine to understand on the threshold that he is essentially an ideologue or theorist, that his primary concern is not with a historic relativism conditioned by time, place, or persons, but with the universal, timeless, and placeless "*pure ground of principle*" where antiquity and precedent cease to be an authority and where "things must be examined abstractedly from custom and usage."<sup>4</sup> Without denying, then, that Quakerism helped to mould Paine's mind, let us examine the extent to which scientific and humanitarian deism inspired his widely influential theories in (1) religion, (2) politics, (3) economics, (4) social service, (5) education, and (6) literary composition.

## I

His major premises, from which he deduced his practical theories in these six fields, may be summarized as follows: (A) outward nature, in the eye of rationalistic science (more than the inner light of the mystical Quakers); is the primary revelation of a Creator, benevolent and immaterial; (B) the scientific study of nature reveals, also, a "harmonious, magnificent order"<sup>5</sup>; "nature . . . is the laws the Creator has prescribed to matter"<sup>6</sup>; (C) the natural man shares the divine benevolence, is instinctively altruistic, and in this harmonious order his "wants, acting upon every individual, impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a

<sup>3</sup> *Writings*, IV, 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 61.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 340.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 339; see also pp. 242; 311.

centre”<sup>7</sup>; (D) an attempt to re-establish in thought and action the lost harmony with this uniform, immutable, universal, and eternal law and order which is nature, and to modify or overthrow whatever traditional institutions have obscured this order and thrown its natural harmony into discord, will constitute progress (of which Paine was one of the radiant heralds), will radically decrease human misery, and will rapidly usher in “the birthday of a new world.”<sup>8</sup>

While such doctrines permeated the contemporary mind and were doubtless accessible to Paine in dozens of pamphlets, magazines, and books, as well as in his constant conversations with the social circles centering about Franklin in America, Godwin in England, and Condorcet in France, the presence of these major premises, in decreasing ratio to be sure, in the published lectures of Benjamin Martin and James Ferguson (to whom Paine listened at the formative age of twenty) suggests that these popularizers of Newtonianism may have aided in molding his scientific deism, especially when one considers his own testimony regarding the growth of his mind.<sup>9</sup>

Paine was reluctant to develop publicly the destructive implications of these major premises until “in the general wreck of superstition, of false systems of government, and false theology,” as he said in the Preface to *The Age of Reason* with reference to the French Revolution, he feared that men would “lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true.” In the shadow of the guillotine, when France had put out the altar lamp, he consecrated himself to lead humanity out of the threatened night of atheism to the universal light of natural religion and to faith in a Creator, the divinity of reason, and the immortality of the soul. Keeping step with unseen drummers, he hoisted the banner of *The Age of Reason* and began his headlong march against “what is called the christian system of faith, including in it the whimsical account of the creation, the strange story of Eve, the snake, and the apple; the amphibious idea of a man-god; the corporeal idea of the death of a god; the mythological idea of a family of gods, and the Christian system of arithmetic, that three are one and one is three,” finding such doctrines “all irreconcilable, not only to the divine gift of

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 406.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 119.

<sup>9</sup> For evidence regarding this matter, see my paper entitled “An Historical Interpretation of Thomas Paine’s Religion,” published in *The University of California Chronicle*, XXXV, 56-87 (January, 1933), the main conclusion of which have been summarized here.

reason that God has given to man, but to the knowledge that man gains of the power and wisdom of God by the aid of the sciences, and by studying the structure of the universe that God has made."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, a close study of some one hundred and twenty-five contemporary books and pamphlets attacking or defending Paine's theories, considered in relation to the chronology of his work, offers a neglected key to the actual development and elaboration of his theories. Such a study suggests that he was forced reluctantly to modify his life-long resolve to be one "who never dishonours religion either by ridiculing or cavilling at any denomination whatsoever,"<sup>11</sup> by the ecclesiastical opposition to humanitarian reform, and by the fact that his pious opponents insisted upon the argument that the throne was sanctioned by the altar, that submission to the hierarchy of the feudal state was grounded upon submission to the hierarchy of the national church. Thus, historically, the church deliberately obliged liberals and equalitarians who had begun the march to republicanism to trample upon her sacred domain.

## II

As regards the view that in Paine an honorable champion of political liberty deplorably and irrelevantly succumbed in old age to religious infidelity, it is essential to notice that according to his own testimony, for some time *after* having studied astronomy and having come to doubt Christianity, he said, he "had no disposition for what are called politics. . . . When, therefore, I turned my thoughts towards matters of government, I had to form a system for myself, that accorded with the moral and philosophic principles in which I had been educated."<sup>12</sup> Clearly his political theories, then, grew out of his religion, his scientific deism, and its moral and philosophic implications. As a political thinker, after tracing the rights of man "to the time when man came from the hand of his Maker,"<sup>13</sup> and after accepting the theory of the social contract whereby man keeps integrally and wholly certain natural rights, such as intellectual rights, Paine adopted two doctrines of far-reaching importance. The first was the desirable possibility of establishing in civil society the reign not of capricious personality through the agency of feudal force, but the reign of impersonal law and order, comparable to the

<sup>10</sup> *Writings*, IV, 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 121.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 62-63.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 303.

law and order of the Newtonian universe. The second was the conviction that this reign of law could be effected best by representative republican government based on the native altruism of the people, and their instinctive devotion to what is clearly best both for themselves and for society. Since Newtonianism had supplied mathematical proof of a universal, all-embracing, divinely-ordained harmony, a universe throbbing with the rhythm of benevolence, and since the Creator and the creation could not therefore be at strife, it followed, according to Paine, that man, the crown of creation, shares this divine harmony manifesting the infinite goodness of the Creator; "man, were he not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man, and . . . human nature is not of itself vicious";<sup>14</sup> "the great mass of people are invariably just, both in their intentions and in their objects."<sup>15</sup> The view that Paine's major premises derive from England and ultimately from the Enlightenment does not preclude the possibility that they were powerfully reinforced in his mind by the concrete observation of social suffering in England, by political history in America and France, by conversation with political theorists such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Barlow, not to mention dozens of English reformers, and by his respectful acquaintance with the theories of French liberals such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Raynal, Turgot, Brissot, Helvétius, and Condorcet.<sup>16</sup> The French liberals and the physical conditions in France described by Arthur Young may have helped to turn the comparatively innocuous ideas of scientific deism into channels destructive of throne and altar; it is suggestive, for example, that Paine's glorification of "the general will" should be followed by a quotation from Rousseau's *The Social Contract*.<sup>17</sup>

Paine's political activity is devoted, then, to the establishment of a republican empire of laws, crowned by a coercive constitution, to be created by periodically elected representatives of the naturally altruistic people. Thus his *Common Sense* and *The Crisis* had a "prodigious" influence, as his patron Franklin said, in making America independent of the capricious feudalism of monarchical England; he was among the first to urge a coercive union—the

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 453.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 122.

<sup>16</sup> I have suggested some parallels in a paper entitled "Thomas Paine's Relation to Voltaire and Rousseau" in the *Revue Anglo-Américaine*, IX, 305-318; 393-405 (April and June, 1932).

<sup>17</sup> *Writings*, III, 104, 80-81; I, 150; II, 334.

"foundation-stone"<sup>18</sup> of America—and he was among the first to advocate calling a convention to create a Constitution which he said, picturesquely, should have "a crown . . . placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America the law is king."<sup>19</sup> He was among the very first to placard Paris in the French Revolution urging her to follow the American example in substituting for a monarchy a republic, a substitution which he defended against Burke and other royalists in the *Rights of Man* and later publications. Representative republican government must supplant monarchy, Paine argued, for, if "the representative system is always parallel with the order and immutable laws of nature, and meets the reason of man in every part,"<sup>20</sup> such being "the order of nature, the order of government must necessarily follow it,"<sup>21</sup> for "all the great laws of society are laws of nature."<sup>22</sup> He held that "the sovereign authority in any country is in the power of making the laws," that "the government of a free country, properly speaking, is not in the persons, but in the laws,"<sup>23</sup> and that executives "are no other than authorities to superintend the execution of the laws,"<sup>24</sup> which are ultimately safeguarded by a constitution sanctioning not only the control of lawless individuals but "establishing a common principle that shall limit and control the power and impulse of party, and . . . say . . . to all parties, *thus far shalt thou go, and no further*."<sup>25</sup> The popular contemporary notion that Paine's naturalism made him a dangerous apostle of lawlessness would therefore appear to be based upon ludicrous misunderstandings. For the nature he wishes to follow was the law and order of the harmonious Newtonian universe, which to Paine promised a harmony among men whereby they could establish a parallel civil law and order.

### III

According to an eminent historian of the American mind, Paine, who is discussed as belonging to "The French Group" of our political thinkers, "asserted that governmental policies rest on economic foundations," his primary concern was "for the national economy,"

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 340.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 426.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 419.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 408.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 428.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 276.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 277.

and he was "essentially a Physiocratic agrarian."<sup>26</sup> In the light of what has already been said, the question might well be raised whether, important as are Paine's economic theories, they are not essentially deductions from major premises which are religious; furthermore, it is difficult to prove that Paine was more interested in the welfare of the farmer than in that of the industrialist. Scientific deism, and especially popular interpretations of Newtonianism, offered graphic support in Paine's mind for the eighteenth-century international theory of the harmony of "self-love and social"<sup>27</sup> which underlies his economic theory that social regeneration depends upon giving free rein to the self-interest of individuals which will naturally, he held, promote the ultimate object of government, "the good of all."<sup>28</sup> According to this theory of ethical gravitation, wants impel people naturally into society and bind them together more effectively than does feudal militarism; "if commerce were permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war, and produce a revolution in the uncivilised state of governments."<sup>29</sup> Since a "great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government," having "its origin in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man,"<sup>30</sup> he held that "in England the improvements in agriculture, useful arts, manufactures, and commerce, have been made in opposition to the genius of its government, which is that of following precedents," economic progress being effected largely by the "enterprise and industry" of the individual, the sum of whose "hope, with respect to government, was *that it would let him alone*."<sup>31</sup> Thus, in whatever degree due to the influence of Franklin, Adam Smith, Jefferson, or Turgot, Paine aligned himself with those who defended *laissez-faire*, eager to "make safe the liberty of industry and of trade";<sup>32</sup> "commerce needs no other protection than the reciprocal interest which every nation feels in supporting it."<sup>33</sup> Since "common interest produces common security," Paine's constructive economic and social theories were based on the conviction that "the prosperity

<sup>26</sup> V. L. Parrington, *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* (New York, 1927), pp. 329, 333, 337.

<sup>27</sup> Pope's "Essay on Man," III, 1, 149.

<sup>28</sup> *Writings*, II, 443.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 456.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 406.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 442.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 460.

of nations is best promoted" by "agriculture, commerce, manufactures, and the tranquil arts,"<sup>34</sup> and a detailed survey of his activities in these directions would fill a book. If he had agrarian tendencies, as in his proposed plan in *Agrarian Justice* for taxing the unearned increment of land, which "comes to us from the Creator,"<sup>35</sup> it is well to recall that he also had certain relations to the capitalistic program of Federalists such as Hamilton, since Paine helped to found the first national bank of 1780, which he valiantly defended in his *Dissertation on Government; the Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money*, which began the attack upon paper money culminating in *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*. "Gold and silver are the emissions of nature: paper is the emission of art."<sup>36</sup> Whereas the agrarians favored paper money as a balm for the debtors, Paine opposed it because "most of the advocates for tender laws are those who have debts to discharge, and who take refuge in such a law, to violate their contracts and cheat their creditors."<sup>37</sup> If his ultimate premises were abstract and religious, their outworking was concrete and practically focused, a fact which distinguishes him from many contemporary theoretical Utopians; he attempted to provide what seemed to him a sound economic basis for a program of social welfare.

#### IV

If the Darwinian doctrine of evolutionary change and the ruthless struggle for existence has somewhat undermined the *theoretical* and partly Newtonian basis of Paine's faith in a specially created and unchangingly uniform order and in natural altruism, it may be that he appears most favorably today in his attempts to *practise* his "religion of humanity." If to a scientific deist who saw the deity revealed only in laws of nature inexorably immutable, prayer seemed not only futile but impious, an attempt to make the deity change his mind, it followed, Paine thought, that "the only idea we can have of serving God is that of contributing to the happiness of the living creation God has made."<sup>38</sup> Whereas the typical Christian, seeing evil as primarily a constant fact of the inner life, had counseled outer charity but exalted the primary duty of introspection and the dis-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 388.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 324.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 176.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 181.

<sup>38</sup> See also *Writings*, IV, 22; III, 327.



ciplined endeavor before trying to reform one's neighbors of reforming himself in relation to a higher perfection, Paine, seeing evil (especially in later life) as mainly a temporary fact of the outer life, rooted in social institutions, was indifferent to prayer, introspection, and the inner life, and was confident that immortality awaited only "those whose lives have been spent in doing good, and endeavouring to make their fellow-mortals happy, for this is the only way in which we can serve God."<sup>39</sup> Thus scientific deism directly motivated his vast humanitarian interests, which may be divided into two classes for the sake of summary, the first comprising his endeavors as an inventor to save time and life, the second, his endeavors as a pamphleteer and legislator to enact laws eliminating abuses and promoting the social welfare of mankind. If time permitted full consideration of these matters, we should discuss in the first class inventions such as (1) a crane, (2) smokeless candles, (3) a planing machine, (4) an engine operated by gunpowder, (5) a steam turbine, (6) remedies for yellow fever, and (7) his single-arch bridge, especially, which was approved by the French Academy; we should discuss in the second class such matters as legislative programs looking toward (1) adequate salaries for excise men, (2) abolition of slavery, (3) abolition of duelling, (4) effective international copyright laws, (5) abolition of the death penalty, (6) better universal education, (7) old age pensions, (8) abolition of primogeniture, (9) curtailment of property inequalities, especially through an income tax, (10) a league of nations, and (11) international disarmament. If anyone questions whether Paine could combine *a priori* thinking of a Utopian sort with interest in concrete details relative to putting his theories into social practice, let him study the fourteen-point program of social reform sketched near the conclusion of the Second Part of the *Rights of Man*. "My religion," Paine proclaimed, "is to do good";<sup>40</sup> "I defend," said the so-called Physiocratic agrarian, "the cause of the poor, of the manufacturers, of the tradesmen, of the farmer, and of all those on whom the real burden of the taxes fall [*sic*]<sup>—</sup>but above all I defend the cause of humanity." He summarized the *Rights of Man* as containing plans "for the increase of commerce and manufactures—for the extinction of war—for the

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 420.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 472.

education of the children of the poor—for the comfortable support of the aged and decayed persons of both sexes—for the relief of the army and navy, and, in short, for the promotion of everything that can benefit the moral, civil, and political condition of Man.”<sup>41</sup> Paine’s contemporaries called for more than half a million copies of his work, and mention has been made of an hundred and twenty-five contemporary pamphlets and books, some of them two volumes in length, some of them having run to ten editions, in which these theories are discussed, attacked or defended; is it not possible that this vast popular education in humanitarian principles, coming about 1793, helped to prepare a sympathetic audience for the humanitarianism of the Romantic Poets, and possibly for humanitarians like Dickens? If, as a recent study holds,<sup>42</sup> Wordsworth’s early humanitarianism derived not so much from Godwin as from Paine, what is the exact history of Paine’s influence upon other poets of the romantic and Victorian eras, upon Godwin, upon Robert Owen and the Chartist movement, upon the Reform bills of 1832 and 1867, upon socialism and communism, upon the history of the advocacy of land nationalization, and a dozen other movements, not to mention developments in Ireland<sup>43</sup>?

## V

Paine, like Jefferson, read much more and knew much more about ancient traditions than is generally supposed. Yet his faith in progress, engendered partly by science, convinced him of the inferiority of the past as compared with the contemporary times, and reinforced his indifference toward precedent. An apostle of reason warring against obscurantism, he relied upon education as the chief means of putting away the works of darkness; it is important to note, however, that in championing education he urged a crucial shift from the study of man to the study of nature, from letters to science. Whatever may have been the influence in this respect of

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 56.

<sup>42</sup> See E. N. Hooker, “Wordsworth’s Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” *Studies in Philology*, XXVIII, 522-531 (July, 1931); and Charles W. Roberts, “The Influence of Godwin on Wordsworth’s Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” *Studies in Philology*, XXIX, 588-606 (October, 1932).

<sup>43</sup> See Lionel Woodward, “Les projets de descente en Irlande et les réfugiés irlandais et anglais en France sous la Convention,” *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, VIII, 1-30 (Janvier-Février, 1931).

Franklin, who sponsored a somewhat similar shift of emphasis, it is clear that Paine's primary motivation was religious. For Paine concluded *The Age of Reason* with the conviction that "we can know God only through his works," through nature. "The principles of science lead to this knowledge; for the Creator of man is the Creator of science, and it is through that medium that man can see God, as it were, face to face."<sup>44</sup> Whereas "the study of theology in books of opinion has often produced the numerous persecutions, the fanatical quarrels, the religious burnings and massacres, that have desolated Europe," the "mind becomes at once enlightened and serene" and the "social faculties become enlarged" when man looks "through the works of creation to the Creator himself,"<sup>45</sup> for "the Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation; the first philosopher and original teacher of all science."<sup>46</sup> Hence astronomy, the queen of sciences, "should be taught theologically" in a series of lectures which would "render theology the most delightful and entertaining of all studies."<sup>47</sup> He would have every true "house of devotion a school of science" dedicated to the teaching of "the immutable laws of science."<sup>48</sup> Such being his religious faith, convinced that "the advocates of the Christian system," fearing "the continually progressive knowledge that man would gain by science," would reveal the falsity of their system, had restricted "the idea of learning to the dead study of the dead languages"<sup>49</sup> and not only rejected the sciences but persecuted the professors, Paine urged that "it would therefore be advantageous to the state of learning to abolish the study of the dead languages, and to make learning consist, as it originally did, in scientific knowledge." Thus nature, which "speaketh a universal language, independently of human speech or human languages," which "reveals all that is necessary for man to know of God," should constitute the subject matter of education, stress being laid upon the discovery of laws such as those of gravitation, laws which, in turn, suggest the all-embracing cosmic harmony of law and order, divinely ordained, which constitutes Paine's major premise.

## VI

Of course the current economic distress made Paine's contemporaries unusually receptive toward writing advocating reform.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 191.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 239-240.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 193.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 246.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 194.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 58ff.

Since such writing was abundant, however, and since his ideas were nearly all old, available in dozens of other books, the vast popularity of Paine's work must be ascribed not so much to what he said as to how he said it, to his literary manner. Elsewhere, on the basis of his own assembled testimony, I have made a study of the evidence relating to his theories of rhetoric.<sup>50</sup> His literary aims may be summarized briefly as embracing an endeavor to:

- (1) Be candid, simple, and clear;
- (2) Be bold;
- (3) Be witty;
- (4) Appeal to feeling, an aim which uses as means those niceties of composition productive of emotional pleasure, such as connotation, antithesis, balance, cadence, and vivid figures; to "make the reader feel, fancy, and understand justly at the same time";<sup>51</sup>
- (5) Strike a disciplined balance between the imagination, which is "the mainspring which puts all in motion," and the judgment, which "corrects and regulates";<sup>52</sup>
- (6) "Fit the powers of thinking and the turn of language to the subject, so as to bring out a clear conclusion that shall hit the point in question and nothing else," which "is the true criterion of writing";<sup>53</sup>
- (7) Arrange the units of composition in an architectonic pattern designed to give them their maximum effectiveness; "it is only by reducing complicated things to method and orderly connexion that they can be understood with advantage, or pursued with success."

As regards principles of literary composition there is certainly a neglected but significant parallel between deism and neo-classicism, as Professor A. O. Lovejoy<sup>54</sup> has recently pointed out. And the distinctive features of Paine's theories of literary composition, the effectiveness of which is suggested by his commanding more than half a million readers, were in no small measure conditioned by scientific deism, with its stress on a disciplined conformity to a natural law and order. For the crowning stress which Paine lays

<sup>50</sup> "Thomas Paine's Theories of Rhetoric," to be published shortly in *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*.

<sup>51</sup> *Writings*, II, 69.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 361.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 110.

<sup>54</sup> "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," *Modern Philology*, XXIX, 281-299 (Feb., 1932).

upon harmonizing a writer's powers by allegiance to a judgment which "corrects and regulates" and upon being able to "command thought and as it were to play with it at pleasure," to "hit the point in question and nothing else," is but a reflection, in its stress upon control, of the central philosophy of that day, wherein man found salvation by a disciplined conformity to a nature which is law, "unerring order and universal harmony," an order which "is the standard to which everything must be brought that pretends to be the work or word of God."<sup>55</sup> And Paine's theories of literary composition can only be inadequately interpreted when studied in an æsthetic vacuum and divorced from that background of Newtonian law and scientific deism. Just as his first literary aim, that of clear simplicity, is ultimately grounded on his deistic faith that "man must go back to nature for information" since "perfection consists in simplicity";<sup>56</sup> so his last aim, that of order, is also grounded on his deistic faith that the standard of everything—the revelation even of God himself—is "that harmonious, magnificent order that reigns throughout the visible universe."<sup>57</sup>

If Paine's focal concept, "Follow Nature," means in its historical setting not lawlessness or anarchy but an attempt to approximate in society a natural law and order, a meaning necessitating a re-definition of most of his theories, if a study of one hundred and twenty-five contemporary attacks and defenses considered in relation to the chronology of his work seems to offer a neglected key to the progressive elaboration of his theories and to his influence, it would appear that evidence was being collected which might be considered a modest contribution toward a more accurate, and incidentally a more sympathetic, reinterpretation of Thomas Paine and his historical significance.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Writings*, IV, 339. Deism conditioned not only early American prose but also poetry, as I have tried to suggest in my Introduction to *Poems of Freneau* (New York, 1927).

<sup>56</sup> *Writings*, IV, 333.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 340.

<sup>58</sup> Although the aim of the present paper has been to summarize an attempt exclusively to *interpret* Paine's thought, it may not be amiss to remark that were one to attempt to *appraise* his thought, the essence of which appears to be an advocacy of law and order, one of the major problems to be confronted would be the extent to which the essentially social and *outward* law and order Paine relied upon can be, or has been, genuinely effective and conducive to happiness *unless* it is organic with an *inner* law and order, unless social control in the presence of outer conflicts and environmental evils is rooted in self-control in the presence of an inner conflict between selfishness and altruism.

